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GREEK LITERARY CRITICISM

THE
CHANCELLOR'S ESSAY

1907

BY

WILFRED PERCY JOHNSTON, B.A.

SOMETIME SCHOLAR OF TRINITY COLLEGE, OXFORD

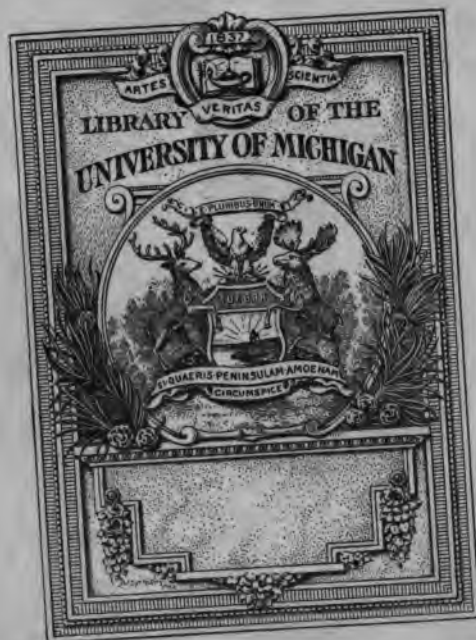
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*Those rules of old discover'd, not devised,
Are nature still, but nature methodised.*

26 Apr. 09 '00.

GREEK LITERARY CRITICISM.

"LITERARY criticism," says the author of the *Treatise on the Sublime*, "is the late-born child of long experience." Whether we consider nations or individuals, we rarely find the critical and the creative faculties in combination. So long as literature advances on the regular and uniform lines which generally characterize its early stages, its principles are taken for granted and its forms accepted as final and all-sufficient. Only the growth of new methods of thought with the consequent revolutions in all departments of mental activity, or the revelation of foreign literatures, or finally internal strife or decadence, can arouse the critical spirit and lead men to enquire into the principles by which their judgments of verse and prose are implicitly directed and controlled. Criticism implies the perception of differences of manner as well as of merit. Without comparison there can be no criticism, and the wider the opportunities of comparison the more satisfying is the criticism likely to be.

Consequently, though it is possible to trace back critical tendencies through Solon and Theognis to the birth of competitions in the Hesiodic age, and even to the applause of the assembled chieftains in the Homeric hall, such researches will reveal only a very inconsiderable bulk of criticism, and no criticism at all which can fairly be called literary. The mass of poetry was too slight in itself and its varieties of form marked by too indecisive a contrast to afford fair opportunities for the exercise of the critical spirit. But obstacles far more vital than mere lack of material stood in the way of the beginnings of Greek criticism, and, though partially removed after the period of preparation, exercised a distorting influence on its subsequent progress. The first and most obvious of these was the enormous reverence in which Homer and indeed all the old poets were held. Not only as the model of all poetry, but as the fountain of all ethical and even of all

rhetorical principles, Homer was as far above criticism as was the Bible in seventeenth-century England. The teacher had to be separated from the poet before criticism could begin: literary appreciation implied the dethronement of the poets from their too proud position. The rationalizing work of Heracleitus of Miletus, the allegorical interpretations of Anaximander, Stesimbrotus and Anaxagoras, and the direct attacks of Xenophanes may be said to have completed this preliminary work. Homer was not robbed of his authority, but his infallibility had been called in question. He was exposed to criticism, though to a criticism which primarily at least was not literary.

A second and more potent obstacle was that Greek view of life which may perhaps be termed the monistic view,—the idea that all activities must stand in immediate relation to a single definite end. The Greek was always unwilling to accept co-ordination; he endeavoured to substitute for it a scheme of subordination. When this prevailing habit of mind is accentuated by the entire absence of the conception of a world of imagination distinct from the world of common realities, it must inevitably offer strenuous resistance to the criticism of literature as literature. In Greece the first reflection on literary questions took the form of an attempt to find poetry's due place in an already accepted scheme of life. That scheme was roughly identical with the City-state; and hence the first criticism was devoted to an examination of the relations between literature and political life. It asked in effect one of two questions. The loftier-minded critics asked, "Is literature compatible with the duty of a citizen?" the more practical asked, "Of what use is literature to a man engaged in politics?" In other words the attempt was made to subordinate literature either to the rules of conduct which governed the citizen, or to the exigencies of rhetoric by which the policy of the State was determined. These extraneous principles govern all the first period of Greek literary criticism. Whether we consider the popular criticism of the comic stage, or the lofty speculations of Plato, or the shallow disputations of the Sophists, we find ethical and rhetorical principles in the main predominant. Plato and Aristotle indeed transcended the narrow limits of the City-state in their metaphysical speculations, but here again the monistic tendency was at work, and aesthetic was strictly subordinated to a philosophy which took no account of imagination. We catch glimpses from the first of a purely aesthetic treatment, but they are transitory and unsubstantial, half-involuntary manifestations of that artistic consciousness

which must ultimately govern all literary criticism. Even in Aristotle, whose genius was as conspicuously analytic as that of his countrymen was conspicuously synthetic, literature has won for itself only a partial emancipation.

Such was the environment into which Greek literary criticism was born in the latter part of the fifth century before Christ. Athens was ripe for a reflective and comprehensive criticism, for the innate critical faculties of the citizens had been exercised in the theatre, and, as we know from the story of Cimon, keenly exercised for several decades. Sophistic teaching was a luxury of the few, but the tragic competitions were within the reach of all. The popular judgment was naturally unreflective. A crowd is never hide-bound to consistency of principle. The verdict of to-morrow may reverse the verdict of to-day. But for to-day the verdict is decisive, and the crowd is ready to accept any reasoning which will justify its settled conclusion. Still a criticism which is designed to catch the popular ear and to voice the popular opinions must conform to the limitations of popular thought, and consequently it is always of value as indicating the predominant temper of mind. This is precisely the value of the satiric criticism of Athens. It only renders articulate popular ideas without attempting to pass above or beyond them, but it has, historically, the immense importance of throwing a vivid light upon the raw material from which a true reflective criticism must be built up.

The scanty remains of the Old Comedy prevent us from examining this material except in the works of Aristophanes. We know that Chionides, Pherecrates and Nicomachus all busied themselves with literature and art. Many titles of plays by Crates, Phrynichus, Strattis and Plato afford conclusive evidence that they followed the same bent, sometimes by means of direct parody, sometimes by open denunciation, sometimes by ephemeral skits. These works have perished, or survive only in isolated fragments. From the point of view of literary criticism the loss is of comparatively slight importance. We require only one vivid and reasonably coherent presentation of the sentiments which an Athenian audience was prepared to accept as the basis of its judgments. In Aristophanes we have precisely such a distinct picture. There is no hesitation in his verdicts, no inconsistency due to a development of thought. The very nature of his satire precluded these vacillations and obscurities. The Athenian populace, great as was its love of dialectic subtleties, demanded for its amusement something more conclusive than a Socratic dialogue. The poet might hope ultimately to lead

popular opinion, but he must first bow down to popular whims. He could no more be impartial than can a political orator addressing a partisan meeting. Impartiality was not demanded of him. His function was merely to amuse without unnecessarily offending.

The popular thought of Athens in the last quarter of the fifth century was mainly political with a pronounced tinge of ethics. The old beliefs lingered on in the case of those who were precluded from the disintegrating luxury of sophistic teaching, and were only rendered more deeply ingrained by the innovating enthusiasm of the new order. Aristophanes was himself an ardent conservative, an opponent of all that seemed to threaten the structure of ancient Athenian life. Conservatism is a force even less discriminating than radicalism, and its condemnation of harmful innovations is readily extended to innovations as such. This was especially the case in an age when men had not come to distinguish between the poet as artist and the poet as preacher. Modifications of poetic form acquired an importance over and above their value as indications of a change of poetic material. The modification of form itself was a symptom of lawlessness and of vicious radicalism. It was not merely demanded that the poets should perpetuate the old order of thought; they must retain too the methods of expression sanctioned by age and glorified by the great names of the past.

Inspired by this conservative force Aristophanes devoted twenty years to a continual attack on the life and work of Euripides. Euripides was the typical man of the hour, the tragic representative of the new intellectualism, a man who strove to keep pace with the march of contemporary thought and to adapt his treatment of ancient myths to the changing conditions of an advancing age. His restless modernity is the exact opposite of Aristophanes' backward-looking pessimism. Any departure from old forms of legends spelt atheism to the critics. Any reference to love unsanctioned by the laws of gods and men called forth an outburst of indignation against immorality and corruption. Courtesans usurped the place of the stately warriors of the Persae; incestuous passions succeeded to the divine fortitude of Prometheus. This was the real crime of Euripides. He chose the myths which depicted the play of lust and love, and brought them down to the level of humanity. He sought for subjects which displayed his own genius, rather than for those which were morally edifying. The whole accusation is summed up in the *Frogs* in the description ascribed to Euripides of the qualities which make a great poet. Ingenuity and subtlety are placed first; the im-

provement of the citizen is relegated to a subordinate position. Euripides was an artist first and only secondarily a preacher.

Such a disposition of mind was heinous heresy to fifth-century Athenian orthodoxy. Subtlety of speech was itself an object of suspicion at a time when men were becoming keenly sensible of the power of words and the possible abuses of that power. Ingenious sophisms were a first step to the destruction of moral integrity and political stability. The famous line from the *Hippolytus* was a very motto for anarchy in all departments of life. Hence to Aristophanes the fine rapier-play of the Euripidean drama was a moral offence even more than an artistic blunder. It involved gods and heroes, already dragged down from the lofty eminence where they had been left by Aeschylus and Sophocles, in that same net of dialectic subtlety which had ensnared the gifted youth of modern Athens.

Such is the thought which lies behind Aristophanes' condemnation of Euripides the teacher. Euripides the artist receives no gentler treatment. His style is condemned off-hand in the comparison of it with the thunders of the Aeschylean verse. His use of stage properties, his innovations in music, his adoption of the Cretan monody, all his departures from the practice of his two great predecessors, were held up to ridicule and abuse; his versification and his tricks of diction were mercilessly parodied. Most of the points of style specifically raised are extremely minute. Some of them are quibbles barely tolerable even in a piece of comic satire. Others raise or suggest important questions, such as the use of resolved feet in Choric songs and the whole problem of tragic dignity and propriety. The mere raising of them marks an advance in critical endeavour, but discussion of them is impossible on the stage. Undoubtedly the best and also the fairest point is scored in connexion with the monotony of the Euripidean prologues. This scene from the *Frogs* is a perfect gem of comedy, but it is also an admirable and honest piece of criticism.

The weight of Aristophanes' censure did not fall on Euripides alone. Xenocles, Ameipsias, Lycis, Phrynichus, Morsimus, are all made the victims of relentless satire. Even Aeschylus, though he emerges triumphant from the *Frogs*, has lost something of his glory in the contest. Sophocles and Agathon alone come off unscathed.

The whole of this criticism is obviously and inevitably one-sided. It gives the view of a partisan armed with a keen and merciless wit. A satirist cannot stop to discuss lest his jests should lose their edge: his success depends upon a sharp and sudden stroke. Doubtless much of Aristophanes' criticism

was governed by the necessity of raising a laugh: his limitations as a critic depended largely upon the limitations of his art. Intense as was his conservatism, we can well believe that he was telling the story of his own struggle between principle and artistic pleasure when he put into the mouth of Dionysus the words—

τὸν μὲν γὰρ ἡγοῦμαι σοφόν, τῷ δ' ἥδομαι

Just so he declares the impotence of his own principles to sway the public taste when he asks—

τί δ' αἰσχρόν, ἦν μὴ τοῖς θεωμένοις δοκῇ;

The commanding genius of Aristophanes could not fail to raise up a host of imitators. Euripides was dead, but his admirers were alive and exposed to the gibes of Axionicus and Philippus. Timocles made an effort to go beyond mere personal attacks and to give on the stage a coherent and semi-philosophic theory of tragedy. This was to stretch the criticism of comedy beyond its due limits, and at the same time the failure of creative energy in poetry diverted the attention of satirists from literature 'as such' to philosophy, from the tradition of the *Frogs* to the tradition of the *Clouds*. Plato, Speusippus and Menedemus were the favourite butts of the new school, and literary criticism passed away from the comic stage, leaving as a monument of its fundamental sincerity the famous fragment of Simylus, which demands as a condition of successful literature—

κρίτην τὸ ῥηθὲν δυνάμενον συναρπάσαι.

"Tragedy," said Xenocrates, "does not deign to answer the criticisms of comedy." The dignity of a serious poet does not readily bow before the witticisms of a professional scoffer. His consciousness of sincere endeavour and true ideals supports him alike against ridicule and against abuse. Yet Euripides not only debased his own art by using it as a medium for criticism of Aeschylus' technique and the exposition of his own poetic theories: he seems also—though it is not always easy to distinguish between the poet himself and his literary executors—to have felt the justice of some of the criticisms levelled against him, or to have shrunk from the storm of popular ridicule. In any case there are traces of correction in the *Medea* consequent upon the *Thesmophoriazusae*, and there is a certain amount of authority for supposing that the *Iphigenia in Aulis* was remodelled, and the *Telephus* provided with a new prologue, after the death of the poet and in consequence of the criticism of the *Frogs*. It is easy to exaggerate the influence of the comic poets and to find traces of such influence where none in fact exists, but the evidence

is sufficient to justify the conclusion that the voice of democracy could make itself heard in literary matters, and that the weapons of criticism were wielded not only by experts, but also by the many.

This fact is essentially characteristic of the Athenian people, but such a democratic spirit does not carry us far on the road towards a true criticism—a criticism, not governed by prejudice and caprice, but wedded to aesthetic and directed to the full appreciation and honest solution of artistic problems. For this a more laborious training was necessary. The gibes of the comic stage were the momentary scintillations of a ready wit, but the fabric of an intelligible aesthetic must be built up by slow degrees, and completed only after many a blunder and many a disappointed hope. This slow progress was essentially the work of philosophy, though the actual trend of philosophic thought caused the problems of literature to be attacked at first only incidentally and in strict relation to other and more absorbing interests, and prevented them from asserting their claim to a distinctive and coherent treatment until Greek literature was drawing to its close.

The second order of rhapsodists, who divided their energies between allegorical exposition and the elucidation of difficult and obsolete words, were the critical ancestors of Plato and Aristotle. If the picture given to us in Plato's *Ion* be true, we must believe that they were essentially superficial interpreters whose only useful function was fulfilled when they had kept alive the memory of the Homeric poems until the dawn of a more cultured age. The Sophists, who succeeded to their place in the public estimation, were, above all, rhetoricians. The study of the art of persuasion by language has a natural affinity with the study of the structure of language itself, but to regard language primarily as an utilitarian instrument is by no means a good preparation for the intelligent appreciation of works of art. Diogenes Laertius does indeed ascribe to Democritus certain technical aesthetic works—probably by error—but the evidence of the Homeric Scholia points to the conclusion that his interest in particular poets was mainly, if not entirely, grammatical. Protagoras furnished an exposition of Simonides, in which also the grammatical interest probably predominated, and Aristotle does him the ill-service of preserving an eminently foolish piece of carping criticism on the first line of the *Iliad*. Gorgias had a theory of poetry, but the fragments preserved by Plutarch give us only a somewhat laboured paradox on artistic deceit, with some faint implicit recognition of the power and value of imagination. The few relics of direct evidence which we

possess afford no ground for doubting the substantial accuracy of Plato's presentation of sophistic thought, at all events in connexion with literary matters; while the strenuous and persistent nature of his opposition to sophistic aesthetic renders it incredible that he was fighting a mere shadow cast by an unreasonable prejudice. The *Hippias Major* is probably not to be taken too seriously. The method of refutation is as quibbling, shallow and insincere as the doctrines which are refuted. The only conclusion which can safely be drawn from it in relation to the Sophists is the purely general conclusion that the aesthetic of Hippias and his like turned on an attempt to define the beautiful in terms of other categories. On the lower plane, however, it is idle to deny to the Sophists the credit of drawing attention to the necessity for a standard of prose-style. The objection constantly taken in the Platonic dialogues to the trivial instances adduced by Socrates is an indication of the demand for dignity, tending, in the first enthusiasm of novelty, to degenerate into mere preciousness. The poetic style universally ascribed to Gorgias points to the recognition of prose as a suitable medium for artistic treatment. The recognition was reflective, and such reflection is of immense importance in the history of criticism, even though the immediate effect may be frigid artificiality or turgid bombast.

Isocrates is depicted by Plato as halting between the road of philosophy and the road of mere rhetoric. That description accurately gives his logical position in the development of Greek criticism. On the one hand he revolted against the shallowness of sophistic teaching, but on the other he confined himself to teaching by precept and example a purer rhetoric, without venturing on those higher grounds whence all literary criticism must ultimately take its spring.

The beginnings of philosophic criticism properly so called are shrouded in obscurity. We know that Socrates, like his great disciple, was divided between a tendency to estimate poetry solely by the standard of moral utility, and a tendency to find in plastic art the manifestation of an abstract ideal beauty. We know too that he concerned himself with the problems of resemblance in art, of the "imitation" of mental moods, and of the apparent relativity of beauty. But we have only a statement of the problems without any indication of the method of solution. We must look to Plato for a full statement of the difficulties, and the free development of the thought which could place those difficulties in their true light.

With Plato literary criticism definitely emerges from the

shadow

preliminary stages of formation and preparation. It does not yet attain to an independent and self-sufficing existence: it occupies an ancillary position in relation to the larger problems of metaphysics, politics and ethics. Plato starts from the philosophic standpoint and works downwards to the standpoint of the critic. Indeed from a passage in the *Protagoras* we gather that the work of criticism is derogatory to the dignity of a philosopher. The discussion of poetry is appropriate only to the banquets of smaller men who are compelled to make up their own mental deficiencies by hiring other men's voices and other men's thoughts. Plato's critical work is consequently incidental and always designed to serve some loftier philosophic purpose.

His metaphysic at first glance seems to give an admirable starting point for an aesthetic theory. The conception of the *αὐτοκαλόν* as an objective reality forming part of the hierarchy of Ideas which culminates in the Idea of the Good, suggests at once the possibility of a science of the beautiful, and the existence of a definite ideal which should direct and control artistic creation. Plato's aesthetic however does not develop on these lines at all. The Idea of the Beautiful in common with the other ideas constitutes the end and ideal of knowledge; it is not the dimly realized power which inspires the effort of the artist. Indeed the unreality of the phenomenal world involves the double unreality of the creations of art. The picture and the poem are only copies of copies, and to be content with this twofold divergence from reality is to offend against truth and to flout the aspirations of the philosophic nature. Men who are gifted only with the ordinary powers of artistic appreciation are "lost in the wide, pathless desert of dim sleep." They mistake resemblance for substance and are satisfied with that which partakes of beauty because they are unable to apprehend beauty itself. There is a pure beauty within the comprehension of man, but it is the beauty of perfect geometrical figures, of single tones and single colours—a beauty as far as possible removed from the complexities of art. In the *Laws* indeed we find an attempt to combine beauty of technique and truth of imitation as the necessary constituents of good art, and in the *Republic* we have the admission that plastic art is not to be judged by the standard of its resemblance to the phenomenal world; but, taking Plato's thought as a whole, we are driven to conclude that any conception of art for art's sake was incompatible with his metaphysical ideals.

Plato, the moral and political philosopher, strikes with a scarcely less heavy hand. The ethical associations of the

word καλὸς inevitably led a Greek thinker to exaggerate unduly the connexion between art and the moral life. The position of the older, and indeed of contemporary poets, as the national teachers further emphasized the tendency. Education could not be considered apart from the poets, and Plato, in devising a system of training for men who were to live the ideal civic life and to sacrifice their individuality to the advantage of the State, had perforce to shut his ears against the siren-charms of poetry as such. Every myth which represents the gods as liable to moral weakness, every passage which depicts the heroes of legend in unworthy situations or which paints death in gloomy colours is to be mercilessly erased. Even when we come to the question of style we find Plato entirely occupied with the ethical bearings of Imitation and Simple Narration. The distinction between the two styles is itself an aesthetic distinction, but it is never expounded or discussed on aesthetic lines.

It cannot be urged that Plato is dealing in the *Republic* with men so far removed from the common world, and so merged in the ideal life of the State, that his criticisms have no bearing on the literary movements of the day. It is true that in the *Laws* his standard is less exalted, and that even comedy receives a limited and precarious sanction, but the criticism of the tenth book of the *Republic*, concerning as it does a great part of epic poetry—for Homer is the first and greatest of tragic poets.—and the whole of the drama, rests on wholly general considerations and is independent of any particular scheme of education.

Imitation, Plato affirms, is concerned not with the uniform, but with the variable. Sharp contrast is essential to the business of the stage. If a poet were to exhibit the calm and uniform life of reason, he would not only fail to give the peculiar dramatic pleasure, he would not even be understood. Such exalted peace is too far removed from the passionate natures of the spectators. The successful dramatist must confine himself to the delineation of peevish and changeful natures. He must depict not the highest parts of the human soul, but the morally lower and the intellectually weaker. He nourishes and tends these inferior elements as they exist in the souls of his audience, and proportionately weakens the power and authority of reason. He produces anarchy and discord in the minds of the citizens, and this anarchy and discord are inevitably reflected in the life of the State. This is not an indictment of any accidental qualities of poetry; it strikes at the very root of all emotional literature, of all literature which treats of moral vacillation and even of victory

over moral weakness. There is no question of the attitude of a particular poet towards the problems of morality. Every poet is compelled by his art to treat of that stage of development in which there can be moral problems, and in that limitation lies his offence. The condemnation must further extend to cover all literature whatsoever. For, whereas in an earlier discussion Plato regarded imitation and its evil effects mainly from the point of view of the actor, he here denounces its influence on the spectator. There is no difference, psychologically, between a tale enacted on the stage, and one set out in simple narration. The dramatic effects are perhaps, as a rule, more intense, but the effect on the reader is only restricted by the limitations of his imagination. The drama, the epic, and the novel must stand or fall together.

The exception from the general condemnation of hymns to the gods and panegyrics on the Good is no very generous concession to poetry, and yet the very fact that there is an exception is of the greatest importance in estimating Plato's personal attitude towards the question. For though his condemnation is reasoned, and, on his premises, conclusive, he sometimes moves on a less exalted plane of thought where his zeal is less uncompromising. At all times he is full of regret for the enforced banishment of poetry. He expels the "genial, versatile poet" from the ideal state, but he crowns him with the garlands of honour and escorts him to the frontier with all the pomp and circumstance of civic respect. He confesses freely his susceptibility to the charm of verse. Poetry is a delight and a passion—these facts are never questioned—but the philosopher must go on to consider whether the delight is innocent and the passion conducive to the true and permanent welfare of State and citizen. To identify the excellence of art with pleasure is either open blasphemy or else a frank admission that art is mere flattery of the many. Pleasure is in itself no sufficient justification; but the pleasure is there, keen and certain, and it is the pleasure of the wise—the pleasure of Plato.

It is in the half shame-faced admissions appearing here and there amid the towering masses of ethical and metaphysical speculation that we must look for Plato's aesthetic doctrines. The *Ion*, frivolous and inconclusive as it is—the outcome of one of Plato's lighter moments, and probably of his earlier years—is a good illustration of this plane of his thought. It is true that the exaltation of the poet follows in exact proportion on the depreciation of the rhapsodist, but it is impossible to believe that the whole dialogue is to be estimated by the spirit of railery which concludes it. The question raised is

essentially a critical question :—what is the criterion by which we adjudge one poet superior to another? We may grant that the thought of Homer is superior to that of Metrodorus, Stesimbrotus and the rest, but that differentia does not cover the peculiar poetic quality. It does not explain why Homer alone and not Archilochus or Hesiod can rouse the enthusiastic eloquence of Ion. Nor does it explain how Tunnychus, the most contemptible of poets, could compose one of the best of poems. All these difficulties are resolved by the traditional doctrine of the inspiration of the poet, of the magnetic power which emanates from the Muse, transmits itself through the poet, and binds with its spell the reciter, the interpreter and the hearer. Poets are the interpreters of the gods; they compose their poems οὐκ ἐκ τεχνῆς ἀλλ' ἐνθεοὶ ὄντες καὶ κατεχόμενοι.

It must not be forgotten that possession by a god was not the highest of destinies to the Hellenic mind. It recalled too vividly the frenzy of wine and the delirium of love. To Plato, above all, intent upon the equable life controlled by the calm direction of law and reason, possession was dangerous, if not despicable. The sovereign reason was dethroned, and free course given to emotion, to passion and to lust. Consequently, in spite of the statement in the *Phaedrus* that the greatest of the gods' gifts come to us through madness, we have no cause for surprise when we find, in the same dialogue, that the poetic life falls only sixth in the scale of existences.

The only attempt then which Plato makes to defend poetry on philosophic grounds leads up to a conception which is at least ambiguous. He recognises the divine origin of the poetic art, and so far accounts for the sublime pleasure which it gives, but at the same time he indicates a psychical state of artist and audience removed as far as possible from the ideal which he sets up for man. The *Ion* in fact brings into relation the respectful awe and the unmeasured reprobation of which was compounded Plato's critical attitude towards poetry.

In his treatment of prose both these factors reappear. Plato is vividly conscious of the high qualities which go to make a great orator, but he is conscious too that no skill can replace that knowledge of the particular and of the great principles of truth and justice which should be the first objects of the good citizen's attention. Rhetoric is a mighty instrument, but an instrument which may be turned to the base uses of flattery. In the *Phaedrus* the question is raised :—"What are the characteristics of good style and of bad style?"—but the answer at once carries us beyond or above the sphere of mere literary criticism, and even of mere aesthetic. Starting from the definition of rhetoric as ψυχαγωγία, Plato is naturally

led to dwell almost exclusively upon the necessity of accurate knowledge of facts and persons, and upon the importance of adapting the form and method of the speech to suit the particular audience. Intrinsic excellence of form must necessarily be neglected. In this he is not merely following out his own philosophic bent. He takes the art of rhetoric at the value put upon by its professional exponents, as an art with a perfectly definite practical aim. It is the art of persuasion, and form and style are only the means to that end. On that basis Plato criticizes the current rhetorical handbooks and concludes that they are inadequate for the purpose, because they fail to strike at the root either of the subjects treated or of the audience to be persuaded.

In spite however of this absorbing interest, there are passages which point to quite a different view of literary form. We have a criticism of Lysias' speech in terms of organic unity, with ultimately a definite statement that the ideal speech is comparable to an animal organism. We have also a definition of tragedy which takes the ethical material for granted and insists on a due arrangement of the parts in relation to one another and the whole. On the other hand the purely psychological interest leads to the comparison of the spoken and written word with its startling conclusion that no written work, whether in prose or verse, has ever been truly worthy of attention. The Greek antipathy to written works can of course be readily explained, but none the less Plato's most vigorous denunciations of literature seem to shrink into comparative insignificance beside this denial of the possibility of literary excellence as such.

It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to find any central doctrine round which to group Plato's literary views. His position can only be summed up in the most general terms by the statement that his acknowledgment of the charm of verse and of the value of artistic form is always half-reluctant, forced from him in spite of ethical and metaphysical pre-occupations. The first attempt to test literary merit by philosophic criteria resulted only in the general depreciation of art in relation to moral and intellectual ideals. Against the conception of form in the *Phaedrus* we have to set the passage of the *Gorgias* which professes to judge poetry when it has been stripped of all that makes it poetry. This last passage is indeed typical of all that is good and all that is bad in Plato's criticism. He here recognizes the splendour and dignity of tragic poetry, he recognizes the pleasure which such poetry can give, but he attempts to judge by standards which are not the standards of art, and by those standards he is compelled to condemn it.

It remained for the analytic genius of Aristotle to reduce to their due place and order the principles which Plato had perceived, but had attempted to render subordinate and not co-ordinate. Aristotle studied literature not merely for its own sake, but also as a self-contained department of human activity capable of separate scientific investigation. His early commentaries on Homer, his researches into the history and development of poetry, were undertaken in the same spirit as the examination of the constitutions. They provided the material with which he might build up the theory of that art which persuades not by mere reasoning alone, but by play of emotion and charm of verse and grace of style. The persuasive power of poetry is not a conception which need be pressed over-hard. Aristotle abandons the didactic view of poetry; he regards the poet as something other than a preacher; but he feels the ever-present desire for an exhaustive classification, and is driven, even at the cost of a little forcing, to bring poetry into line with those other methods of appeal to the human intellect which form the subject matter of the logical treatises. The ancient commentators were not altogether without reason when they included the *Poetics* and the *Rhetoric* within the compass of the *Organon*.

Distinction and classification do not imply isolation. But it is one thing to seek a place for poetry in an already posited ideal scheme of life, and another to treat poetry as an activity existing in its own right, and then to examine its relation to the being of the metaphysician and the goodness of the moral philosopher. The last is the method of Aristotle. It must indeed necessarily have been so, for though he treats poetry as a separate world in itself, and though he points the way to the distinction of the fine arts from the useful arts, he makes no attempt to establish a theory of the beautiful, or to deal with the fine arts as manifestations in different media of one ruling principle. In itself the distinguishing characteristic which he assigns to poetry is a wholly colourless quality.

The term *Mimesis* is borrowed from Plato, and probably formed part of the common armoury of less competent and forgotten critics; but the doctrine which Aristotle expounds transforms the whole significance of the term. "The painter copies a copy of reality," says Plato: "*ἡ τέχνη μιμείται τὴν φύσιν*," says Aristotle, and at once carries his readers into an absolutely new world. For we have here no mere naturalistic theory, no assault on idealistic tendencies. We are no nearer to Zola than we are to Mallarmé. For art imitates not the external features of the phenomenal world, but the processes of that power by whose workings the phenomenal world is

what it is. The world of nature comes into being by the union of form and matter. Art creates a new world by the impression of the same form upon a new matter. Imitation, then, is creation,—not the re-creation, in a faint copy, of external reality, but the creation of a new reality with a new significance. Creation is indeed the function of art in general according to Aristotle's definition in the *Ethics*; but while the useful arts create in order to supply the deficiencies of nature's material gifts to man after the form of her more bountiful provision for the animal world, the highest function of the fine arts is to render explicit an *εἶδος* which the limitations of nature prevent her from ever bringing to realization at all.

The *εἶκος* which is merely the test for applying to particular critical purposes the larger doctrine of *Μίμνησις*, necessarily undergoes a precisely parallel modification. If *Μίμνησις* meant only faithful adherence to the facts of the outer world, the greater part of the *Poetics* would be a puerile and not very consistent exposition of naturalism. The *εἶκος* would be on a level with that vulgar verisimilitude in which critics of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries sought logical support for their fictitious doctrine of the Aristotelian unities. Aristotle conceives something very different from this. The *εἶκος* which he has in mind is the internal *εἶκος* of the works of poetry, not an extraneous *εἶκος* borrowed from the everyday world. The stores of Greek legend were to him the natural source from which to draw material for poetry. He does not limit the poet to that source; he admits the possibility of a work issuing entirely from the poet's imagination, but a poem not following the traditional lines is still an occasion for surprise. Aristotle is no realist, but a realist who depended for his art exclusively on heroic legends would not be a very terrifying portent. The Phaeacian ships might be rationalized, and yet the *Odyssey* would remain far removed from the world of an Athenian de Goncourt. The poet deals with a world full of wonders:—the wonderful is indeed one of the most pleasure-giving elements of poetry. Wonders cannot be brought within the logic of everyday life, but a world of wonders has a logic of its own,—an inner law of probability which is essential to coherence and intelligibility.

Aristotle again is of opinion,—though he speaks with no great positiveness,—that the characters in a poetic composition should be in some degree idealized, that the heroes should be true heroes, not mere frail men of the world. Now a hero is obviously more logical than the realistic combination of good and evil qualities, though his existence may be more problematical. His subjective *εἶκος*, so to speak, is greater than his

objective *εἶκος*. In approximating to the ideal, he approximates to the type, and his conduct under given circumstances can be more readily and more surely calculated.

The contrast with history brings into still clearer light this almost allegorical nature of tragedy. A tragedy has an essential unity which is not mere temporal succession, nor even the unity given by a single hero. It expresses a *καθόλου* which is more than the sum of the particulars. The unity of a poem depends on something more than mere exclusion of the irrelevant. It represents the eternal and immutable characteristics of human nature,—the very essence of life. In such a scheme there is no room for the fantastic and absurd, for anything which militates against absolute logical coherence. In the more generous scope of an *épique* such incidents as that of the Phaeacian ships may, in consideration of other merits, be allowed, but the illegitimate use of the *Deus ex machina* and other external instruments for the solution of an internal problem is sternly and decisively forbidden.

Imaginative truth differs from scientific truth: in what relation then does it stand to moral truth? Aristotle distinguishes fine art from the activities which make merely for conduct: he traces the origin of poetry back to fundamental demands of human nature: in the *Politics* he even goes so far as to treat the scientific study of physical beauty as one of the ends at which education should aim. The end of art is for him pleasure in one of its many degrees. Art has its uses as an instrument of education, but in the case of a grown man it fulfils its function by the giving of aesthetic enjoyment. These are two different views of art, and Aristotle is careful to give his attention only to one at a time. In the *Politics* he sometimes speaks almost with the voice of Plato, but there is no echo in the *Poetics* of the educational principles of the *Politics*. As he himself says, there is one standard of correctness in poetry and another standard in politics. A more explicit statement of the division between the ethical and aesthetic worlds is not within the capacity of the Greek language. But it could hardly be expected that Aristotle should cut himself entirely and absolutely free from the tradition of his predecessors. Poetry is the imitation of men in action,—that is the fundamental dogma of the *Poetics*. Tragedy, that is to say, works in a material which is purely ethical. To avoid all ethical terms therefore in analysing its psychical effects is beyond the powers of the purest aesthetic of modern days. But emotions spiritualized by aesthetic influences are more than mere emotions. They possess a higher spiritual value and are removed altogether from the world of conduct. The

passions of the tragic characters, the passions into which we must necessarily enter if we are to feel the tragic effect, are the passions which in every-day life influence will. But clearly in aesthetic enjoyment the will receives no direct stimulus. The emotions are purified of the elements which make for action and become merely the content of a condition of the soul which strives only to maintain itself.

This is not precisely the view of Aristotle. The emotions to which he draws particular attention are not the emotions of the characters, but the emotions which spectators might feel if they could take a purely external view of the drama. In common life men do take such an external view of events which do not directly concern them. But the pity or fear induced by some tale of horror in the newspapers is very different from the emotions stirred by *Othello* or *Macbeth*; and, strangely enough, the fictitious horror is far more vivid and acute than that produced by actual events. In the one case we have the virtuous horror of the orderly citizen, in the other we ourselves are haunted by Banquo's ghost, our own hearts are torn by Desdemona's dying pardon. In the Greek drama the chorus filled the part of the orderly citizen, and a spectator intent on analysing his psychical states would readily find himself identifying his own attitude with that of the chorus.

The pity and fear of a magnified chorus are the pity and fear which undergo the mysterious process of *κάθαρσις*. These, the peculiarly tragic emotions, are, in Aristotle's examples, the emotions of contemplation, not of participation in action. They are the emotions of the man who remains imprisoned within the narrow bounds of his own particular being, not of the soul which bursts its fetters and loses itself in the creations of the artist. Such a view, even though it carry with it an individualistic and consequently unsatisfying view of art, at least constitutes a sound defence against Plato's attacks on imitation. In the first place the emotions which affect the spectator are not the emotions imitated by the poet. They are consequent upon the imitation, but are general in their nature. Plato however objects to the stirring of any emotion, and on this point his difference from Aristotle is more formidable and fundamental. For to Aristotle pity and fear are part of the normal equipment of the fully-endowed man. That they are in their measure good and useful qualities would follow naturally from the general doctrine of the Mean. Aristotle however goes further, and explicitly states that the man devoid of fear must be either a maniac or else utterly insensible. Yet fear at least is capable of excess. This Aristotle

would be the first to admit; but it would be a sufficient answer to Plato to maintain that art expels or purifies not only pity and fear, but also kindred emotions, and consequently is not liable to moral condemnation. This however would be to meet an ethical attack by an ethical defence equally vicious from the aesthetic point of view. It is not Aristotle's method, for the one thing that can be asserted of *κάθαρσις* without fear of contradiction is that Aristotle never intended the doctrine to be an ethical justification of art. Even in the *Politics*, where he is dealing with music as a cure for morbid psychic states, the outcome of the *κάθαρσις* is expressed in terms of pleasure. So too in the case of tragedy. Not every man is a neurotic, but every man—and more especially every Greek—possesses a portion of emotionalism, a hidden store of pity and fear which falls at least potentially into the category of *τὰ λυποῦντα*. No doubt the implied excess would be to Aristotle a moral fault, but the main idea is that of the merely painful suppression of feelings yearning for release. Tragedy affords an outlet for this emotionalism. Here again one incidental result may be moral benefit, but the whole significance of the metaphor rests on the conception of the pleasantness of the relief. The escape of the emotions is itself harmless, since tragedy is remote from the world of conduct. Aristotle indeed would probably include tragic terror among these manifestations of fear which are not susceptible of moral predicates.

This is at least part of Aristotle's meaning. If we go further and insist on the purificatory meaning of *κάθαρσις*, we are still free from ethical standards. Tragedy does not annihilate emotionalism. If it did, it would be a stringent medicine, not a lasting delight, and those subjected to its influence would become less than men. The indeterminate emotionalism which, under the influence of the poet, is impressed with an innocent, or rather non-ethical, form, tends to manifest itself permanently in that form. In other words it tends to become an aesthetic not an ethical emotionalism. In so far as this result diminishes the possibility of excess in the world of conduct, there accrues to the spectator moral benefit. This benefit however is incidental and even accidental. The essential point is that, by the operation of tragedy, a potential pain is transformed into an actual delight—the delight of aesthetic appreciation.

Since however the drama—with which may be coupled the novel—is the form of art most intimately associated with conduct and most closely dependent on moral conditions for its aesthetic effect, it is probably impossible, even if it were desirable, to ignore these associations and to build up

a dramatic theory independent of the moral character of the dramatic personages and of the spectators. Aristotle, pronounced as is his revolt from the views of Plato, makes no such attempt. He gives five grounds on which a dramatic composition may be condemned. It may be impossible, irrational, or inconsistent; it may be deficient in technique (*παρὰ τὴν ὀρθότητα τὴν κατὰ τεχνὴν*); or, finally, it may be morally hurtful. The first three faults really violate the principle of the *εἶκος*. They destroy the artistic unity of a piece, because they render it unintelligible. The fourth covers not only what we may roughly term formal defects, but also the failure to arouse pity and fear. The fifth carries us away from Aristotle's general aesthetic and raises anew the whole thorny question of the relation of art to life. In point of fact Aristotle seems to mean little more than that the poet ought not deliberately to demoralize his audience. Character, he says in general terms, must be good, because tragedy is the representation of suffering, and only the suffering of a good man produces pity and fear;—it must be good to rouse our sympathy, not to mend our morals. To offend moral convictions by heaping success and prosperity on the head of a debased character is indeed an artistic blunder, but to apportion the good and evil things of life strictly in conformity with varying degrees of virtue is equally a blunder. The approval or at least the neutrality of the moral consciousness is a necessary condition of good art, but such approval in itself affords no proof of artistic excellence. So-called poetic justice has no place in Aristotle's scheme of serious poetry. But just as it is possible to be too moral for tragic purposes, so is it possible to be too immoral. Gratuitous immorality on the stage stands in the same relation to artistic merit as gratuitous preaching, while its incidental, non-aesthetic effects are necessarily condemned. Aristotle produces but a single instance of such unjustifiable depravity—the character of Menelaus in the *Orestes*. He was no blind admirer of Euripides, and when we recall the tone and the substance of Aristophanes' criticism the silence of Aristotle becomes in the highest degree significant.

The great bulk of his particular criticism is devoted to questions of construction,—the scope of the plot, the arrangement of the incidents, the development and the manipulation of the catastrophe, the part to be played by the chorus. He does indeed touch on points of diction and metre, and *λόγος ἡδυσμένος* finds a place in the definition of tragedy. These are the points which we naturally expect to occupy a prominent and even predominant part in poetic criticism, but for

Aristotle such questions were beyond the range of analysis. The relation of metre to substance was determined by natural laws; in other words its fitness or unfitness was a matter of immediate perception. He made no attempt to analyse, for under such conditions analysis was both superfluous and vain. It is for this reason that Aristotle's criticism, so often seems formal and frigid. He regarded Greek tragedy as the final outcome of poetic development, the end to which all preceding efforts had been unconsciously tending. "The force of nature could no further go," and all that remained for the philosophic critic was to analyse what was susceptible of analysis in existing tragic literature. Homer had to be included in this analysis, for Aristotle maintained with pardonable inconsistency that Homer, though representing an early and consequently imperfect stage of development, was still the greatest and most faultless of poets.

Aristotle's outlook on literature was not wide. It is hardly just to censure him, as Professor Saintsbury appears to do, for being unacquainted with the modern psychological novel, but we may fairly express the wish that he had manifested as keen an interest in foreign literatures as in foreign constitutions. As it was, the works he judged were the works from which he was compelled to draw his principles of judgment. This is, in a measure, true of every critic; but the comparatively small compass of Greek literature and that very orderliness of development which lent itself so kindly to Aristotle's critical methods, led to a tone of finality which would be admirable in a legislator, but is ill adapted to the mobile problems of aesthetics. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, little understood though he was, Aristotle attained by sheer force of dogmatism to an European authority unparalleled in the history of criticism; yet the very qualities which gave him that authority led also to the abuse of it by blind disciples, and so to that temporary eclipse in which his true merits were veiled and the value of his teaching forgotten. Standing between the new world and the old, he was too firmly linked to ancient Greece to be the all-sufficient guide of modern Europe.

It is curious to reflect that at the time when the most influential critical work ever known was given to the world, Greece was still without a common name for literature. Intimate as was the connexion between rhetoric and the criticism of poetry, oratory and prose in general were, for speculative purposes, closely attached to the utilitarian as opposed to the aesthetic world. At the time when the *Poetics* were written, Herodotus had rolled out the stately epic of the



conflict between East and West and Thucydides had fashioned the events of the Peloponnesian War into a closely knit drama; yet Aristotle speaks of history in terms which a modern critic might use of the chronicles of Muratori. If history was thus devoid of aesthetic interest, it might well have been expected that the case of oratory, tried as it was, not by standards of beauty, but by the verdicts of the law courts and the votes of the Assembly, would have been still more lamentable. The peculiar character of the Athenian people saved it from any such ignoble fate. Athens would not listen to a voice that failed to delight it with charm of language and of form. Literary efficiency was the first condition of popular success. But, whereas in the *Poetics* Aristotle had held up a standard other than that of popular approval, in the case of rhetoric the applause of the masses was the first consideration. Practical hints tended to usurp the place of aesthetic principles in the rhetorical hand-books, but practical hints which went to shape the Attic orators could not be entirely lacking in literary interest. Especially is this the case with Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, which, though it obviously moves on a lower plane than the *Poetics*, represents the attempt to improve the current rhetorical training by substituting for shallow sophistry philosophic and literary principles. In the third book we have a discussion of prose style on its own merits. Good prose has laws of its own, though laws which lack not only the definiteness and precision of the laws of poetry, but also their permanence. Prose is always in close touch with common speech and changes with every change in mental and material environment. It suffers the first shock of revolutions barely perceived by the remote hierarchy of the poets. The problem which lies before the prose-writer is that of combining a full measure of the vigour of common speech with something of the dignity which comes of the use of forms and figures sanctioned and consecrated by literary tradition. Aristotle solves the problem by insisting on the essential distinction between the styles of prose and poetry, and yet allowing to prose a certain limited and restrained use of poetical ornaments. The writings of such men as Gorgias and Alcidas are over-bedizened with jewels purloined from the poets, and this excess is an error of taste even more serious than naked and bald simplicity. It is more serious because it may militate against that first requisite of prose-style—perspicuous clearness. Aristotle in fact pleads only for moderation—moderation in the use of epithets, of metaphors and of rare words. Given first absolute lucidity, a discriminating use of these extraneous beauties will add grace and dignity to the

composition. We are also told that prose must possess a certain rhythm, though a definite metrical scheme is not adapted to its requirements.

These general principles are good for all time. The more specific recommendations to which they lead have for the most part lost their significance. Epithets and metaphors condemned by Aristotle as essentially poetical have passed into the common language of the streets, and even if we admit the expediency of laying down a definite rhythmic basis for prose composition, we must also allow the necessity of its profound modification to suit the requirements of different languages. The censure passed on the style of Herodotus possesses the most permanent interest. It is difficult to dissociate the charm of the *History* from the easy flowing sentences in which it is written, but there can be no doubt that Aristotle was right in holding that the more compact periodic style of the orators was better designed to manifest the full capacities of the Greek language. In the *Rhetoric* as in the *Poetics*, though we may sometimes regret Aristotle's apparent lack of sympathy, we cannot fail to be impressed by the keenness and decisiveness of his perception.

After Aristotle Greek criticism sank into a slumber which lasted for three hundred years. The thread of continuity may indeed be traced, but the thread is no more than a bibliography of second-rate writers. We may regret that we have not the opportunity of reading in Theophrastus the teaching of Aristotle illuminated by the livelier colours of the imagination and unclouded by obscurities of text or doctrine. We may hail too in the principles which Aristarchus applied to the criticism of Homer the first fitful gleam of the dawn of Romanticism. But the two main schools of philosophy united in the depreciation of literature, and criticism was starved in the lowly service of grammar and geography. Even after its awakening it never regained its proud position beside the throne of philosophy. The criticism of principle was dead, and the criticism of taste was born to take its place. The critic no longer sought to base his judgments on anything like a metaphysic or aesthetic. His judgments were judgments of immediate perception, not of ordered reasoning. Literature was thus free from the trammels of a mistress not always kind: it had achieved independence, though it had hardly added to its honours. Cultivated taste must always be the ultimate standard of criticism, but a criticism, such as that current to-day, which can give no reasons for its approval or condemnation, is necessarily invertebrate and ephemeral. The history of criticism is the history of the effort to find a

compromise between rigid principle and unsubstantial taste; and, fitly enough, the earliest critical efforts of Europe were devoted to the explicit statement of the two extremes. Unfortunately the taste of the first century before Christ meant the taste of rhetoricians, and criticism remained in bondage to that most stubborn of task-masters, the principle of practical utility. This bondage is most clearly illustrated in the first writer who has a claim upon our attention.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus was above all a rhetorician, and a rhetorician with a very definite purpose. He took up the weapons of criticism to fight against the tendencies conveniently summed up as Asianism, the tendencies to a highly ornate and florid style which set in after the time of Demosthenes and were most conspicuously represented by Hegesias. His aim was to bring oratory and with it all prose back to the highly finished simplicity of the early Greek writers. The effort to recall the fresh vigour of language when the national life was dead may have been vain, but it at least afforded Dionysius the opportunity of showing a keen appreciation of Homer and Herodotus. As a professed rhetorician however he was entirely occupied if not with prose writers, at all events with prose qualities. In the *De Compositione Verborum* the specifically poetical characteristics of Homer are neglected, and he is examined on exactly the same lines as Herodotus. Pindar and Simonides, Plato, Demosthenes and Thucydides are all weighed in the same balance. Dionysius regards literature not from the point of view of aesthetic enjoyment, but from that of a teacher seeking for models which his pupils may copy. He is consequently inclined—in spite of genuine attempts to resist the tendency—to seek for the negative quality of faultlessness rather than the positive merits of originality and fire. In this connexion his criticisms of Plato and Thucydides call for a word of comment.

It is impossible to criticize Plato's style apart from the substance of his dialogues. The *Phaedo* could not be written in the language which is adapted to the law-courts. Plato was a poet as well as a philosopher, but it was always difficult for a reflective Greek to find in poetical prose the fit expression of a poetical subject-matter. Dionysius does not profess to examine the philosophy of Plato, but his misconception of the whole scope and plan of the *Phaedrus*, leads us to believe that his understanding of it was neither very clear nor very profound. If Plato had conformed to the precepts of his critic, he would have sacrificed his position not only as a writer with a decided individual style, but also as a philosopher.

If Aristotle was inclined to underrate the artistic possibility

of history, Dionysius displayed a far more surprising misconception of its scientific value. The function of the historian according to him is not to give an impartial account of past events, but to select incidents which gratify national or civic pride and to construct from them a species of patriotic epic. If, he says, the Peloponnesian War could not be prevented as an event it should at least be forgotten or ignored by posterity. The anti-Athenian bias of Thucydides is next clearly demonstrated by his choice of a subject. Criticism which proceeds on these lines carries with it its own refutation. On the general question of the unity of historical work Dionysius' preference of Herodotus to Thucydides is enormously exaggerated; but there is justice in the remark that the strictly chronological arrangement of Thucydides leads to confusion. The critic at least has a keen sense of that lack of perspective which is, in differing degrees, the fault of every contemporary historian.

Plato and Thucydides are both writers of pronounced individuality. A style which is the reflection of a strong personality may be readily parodied, but it cannot be imitated with success. Consequently we may grant that Philistius' speeches are a better model for actual pleadings than those of Thucydides: as such they are, according to the purely rhetorical standard of criticism, better literature. It is precisely this limited and narrow standard which warps the judgment of Dionysius. The studies of the Attic Orators, into which his professional prejudices introduce no extraneous considerations, are admirable pieces of appreciative criticism. In these we see the real value of his laborious researches, his keen ear for cadence and rhythm, and his delicate sense of the artistic properties of language. In his limited sphere his taste is faultless, and it is only when he attempts to pass out into the arena of general literature that his powers fail him, and he falls into errors of judgment as lamentable as they are absurd.

Plutarch has been called the Boswell of antiquity, and we do indeed find in him that same combination of restless curiosity, canny good sense, and childlike sympathy which marked the friend of Johnson. But he was a Boswell with no inspiring divinity. His voluminous writings are strangely empty of original ideas, and a timid defence of the character of Nausicaa can hardly redeem the mawkishness of a thrice-watered Platonism. The man who regarded literature merely as the gilding of the philosophic pill can hardly hope to rank among the greater critics. Pleasant and amiable as was Plutarch's discursive gossip, it merits no more than a passing

word as we press on to that nameless work which marked the culmination of the second period of Greek criticism.

With the treatise *περὶ ὑψοῦς*, whose author it is convenient still to call by the traditional name of Longinus, the round of Greek criticism was completed. Aristotle summed up the great creative period with the vindication of poetry as a subject entitled to special investigation. He elucidated the relation of literature to reality and goodness, and drafted the code of laws which governed the construction of Greek tragedy. Longinus, treading less exalted ground, formed an exact complement to Aristotle. The *Poetics* was lacking in the sense of the artist's creative energy, of the inspiration which confuses with delight the critical judgment, of all these qualities of fierce enthusiasm and transcendent passion which are summed up in the untranslatable word *ὑψος*. Aristotle's cold logic seems to freeze the appreciation which justifies it. Under his analysing scrutiny pity loses its tenderness and fear its horror. The calmness of the philosopher stills even the stormy passion of poetry. Longinus was no philosopher. He has indeed a semi-mystical doctrine to account for the almost divine grandeur of great orators and poets: the doctrine is admirably expressed, but it in no sense dominates the treatise. The conception of *ὑψος* itself is too vaguely sketched to admit of anything like logical deduction. The treatise is simply a survey of the best of Greek literature with a special view to what we may call inspired style, to the qualities which defy formalism and set the standard of form, to the noble grandeur which is the only justification that literature needs. There is still some taint of rhetorical teaching, some lingering faith in strangely named figures as the royal road to literary excellence. There is even a suggestion that certain passages in the *Iliad* must be read allegorically in order to save them from condemnation as impious. But these tatters of bygone teaching are only the symbols of continuity, the relics in virtue of which we are still entitled to class Longinus among the ancients. The main interest of the treatise lies in the intensely modern spirit which pervades it, and in the definite adoption for critical purposes of the formula "quod semper, quod ubique." An analysis reveals only the skeleton of the conventional work on rhetoric, freed from the customary preoccupations of "Persuasion." The qualification is important, for it marks the complete abandonment of the utilitarian view, and this abandonment left Longinus free to vivify the dead bones of rhetorical hand-books with a series of judgments always sympathetic, generally shrewd and penetrating, and often

rising to that sublimity of tone which he himself set out to expound. The picture of Homer devoting the evening of his life to the weaving of the wondrous fabric of the *Odyssey* and enriching of it with splendours like the fantastic glories of the sunset—this picture alone would place Longinus among the elect of the critics: for, intended though it is for a mild censure, it speaks to us with the warm tones of love itself.

But Longinus produces something more than picturesque and elegant appreciations. He has the advantage over Aristotle of a wider outlook and a truer perspective. He did not confine himself to Greek literature. He quotes, with an approval which affords a striking contrast to the caution of Josephus, the author of *Genesis*, and gives us a comparison, illustrated by two admirable and striking similes, of the styles of Cicero and Demosthenes. Nor was he compelled like his predecessor to make distinctions among the highest. He could look back upon the great masters as on a vast group of mountain peaks towering in almost indistinguishable grandeur above the humbler heights of Alexandrian prettiness. Yet he did not regard them with any blind hysterical enthusiasm: he recognized their faults. Homer and Aeschylus, Plato and Demosthenes are not exempt from his censure. It is precisely the merit of Longinus that he perceived that Hyperides was more faultless than Demosthenes, Apollonius than Homer, Bacchylides than Pindar, Ion of Chios than Sophocles, and that he refused to accept this purely negative standard of judgment. He had the true and sensitive ear of Dionysius of Halicarnassus and yet expressly repudiated the tendency to which that critic fell a victim. He saw that behind their slips of style and errors of expression the great writers had a living force which transcended and mocked at the precepts of the schools.

Yet we have a suggestion of the spirit of the rhetorician in the equal treatment meted out to prose and verse. The necessity of rhythm in prose is unduly accentuated, but the peculiar character of poetry is curiously neglected. We have indeed a distinction between the *φαιρὰν* appropriate to poetry and rhetoric respectively, but on the other hand we have a criticism of Sappho's lovely ode, which could be fitly applied to certain speeches of Demosthenes. "The selection and binding together of the most vehement and striking circumstances of passion" is no small matter, but by itself it does not make poetry: above all it does not make that magnificent ode.

There is something peculiarly appropriate in the fact that in the latest evening of Greek literature we have a warning

voice raised against the dangers of those very qualities which made it great. For the peculiarity of the Greek genius—a peculiarity possessed in some far smaller degree by the French—was its ability to work freely when oppressed by the straitest fetters. No form of art was ever more laden with conventions than Greek tragedy; yet he has a keen eye indeed who can discover traces of cramping restrictions in the works of Aeschylus and Sophocles. Nicety of form was of the very essence of the Greek conception of beauty. "Strangeness added to beauty" is indeed no monopoly of modern schools, but it does not represent the aim which inspired the Greek artist, nor is it the quality which governed the investigations of Greek critics. In Greek art alone do we find the union of absolute freedom of the spirit with the strictest bondage of the law.

But the freedom of the spirit passes away into vacancy: the bondage of the law remains. Aristotle had legislated, but there was none worthy to give aesthetic content to his formulae. He had contented himself with one side of criticism, and that, to our eyes, the least important side. Modern criticism tends to seek for the undefinable and to lose itself in a pathless wilderness pursuing a mirage of unsubstantial and formless ideals. Aristotle's object was definition and analysis, and he analysed and defined construction and style, the two elements of literature which admit of such processes. This difference of criticism has its counterpart in a difference of forms of decadence. The modern decadent revolts against academic formality and exercises himself in the licence of *vers libre* and the fantastic absurdities of *L'Art Nouveau*. The decadence of Greece sought to compensate for its spiritual poverty by an excessive attention to form, sometimes presenting the cold polished surface of Isocratean regularity, sometimes enriching itself with the meretricious adornments of excessive and inappropriate figures. Dionysius of Halicarnassus joined battle with the extravagances of Asianism, but it remained for Longinus to preach the gospel of the spirit and to denounce the vanity of figures animated by no passion, and of form redeemed by no genius from the frigidity of formalism. Just as the passing of the old forms had roused the critical spirit which found final expression in Aristotle, so did the dearth of inspiration call forth the late-born warnings of Longinus.

The very nature of Aristotle's criticism renders the *Poetics* a dangerous book for those who rest on precept even more than on example, but it is an occasion for some surprise that in the eighteenth century the treatise *περὶ ὑψοῦς* was compelled

to father many of those very same empty tricks of style which it was designed to combat. Never in the whole history of ignorance and stupidity has there been a more flagrant example of neglect of substance for form, and of essence for accidents. Many crimes have been committed in the name of Greek criticism, partly through disregard of its peculiar position, partly through misunderstanding of its principles, partly through earnest but indiscriminate admiration. The Greek critics are not the arbiters of every age. Some few of their principles must stand for all time; but literature has advanced beyond the stage of Greek development, and for good or evil can never return to it. It treads new and more diverse paths where the ancient critics can give only vague or delusive guidance. Yet their labour was not in vain, for Aristotle and Longinus will always stand as worthy interpreters of that literature, in relation to which Europe has been learning all too slowly, the lesson formulated by the French poet and critic:—"En Art il faut savoir se séparer de ce qu'on a aimé, sans cesser de l'aimer, mais sans faire de son amour un cénotaphe obstruant les routes libres de l'avenir."



